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SUMMARY

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Gabon

RESEARCH INTO CELLULOSE PRODUCTION IN AFRICA

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SUMMARY

1. World demand for pulp

In recent years there has been a considerable rise in world consumption of pulp, and demand is expected to double by 1975. By then, the demand for raw materials other than northern softwoods and pulps will be far greater than at present. Consequently, it is to be expected that tropical timber will be used for making cellulose.

2. Technical aspects of the question

(a) Variety of raw materials.

Earlier research revealed the wide variety of Africa's forest resources which include a very large number of hardwoods, falling broadly into two classes: heterogeneous mixtures of timbers of variable and ill-defined quality, and planting species of better-known quality.

(b) Use of heterogeneous African hardwoods for papermaking.

Heterogeneous mixtures of African hardwoods can be used to produce unbleached and bleached alkaline pulps, but the production of other types of pulp from this source is much more difficult.

(c) Use of tropical planting species for papermaking.

Species are being selected for planting but the most suitable varieties for papermaking are often difficult to acclimatise. It will be many years before these plantations can be exploited industrially.

(d) Local use of tropical pulps for papermaking

The range of papers that can be manufactured locally from tropical African raw materials is often limited, and in such cases additional supplies of pulp have to be imported.

3. Problems of establishing a paper pulp industry in tropical Africa

(a) Problem of capacity: Mills must not be too small, as they would probably be uneconomic.

(b) The economic problem: Installation costs are always heavy and even higher in the tropics. The price of tropical pulpwood delivered to the mill is of primary importance, as the only element offsetting other charges, which are very high.

(c) Problem of markets: At present few African countries could absorb the entire output of a modern mill. A large part of output would have to be exported to highly competitive markets.

4. Future prospects

Despite these difficulties, plans are being made or actually taking shape in several African republics. Further research will accelerate these developments.

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